



I. INTRODUCTION

1. PURPOSE AND SCOPE

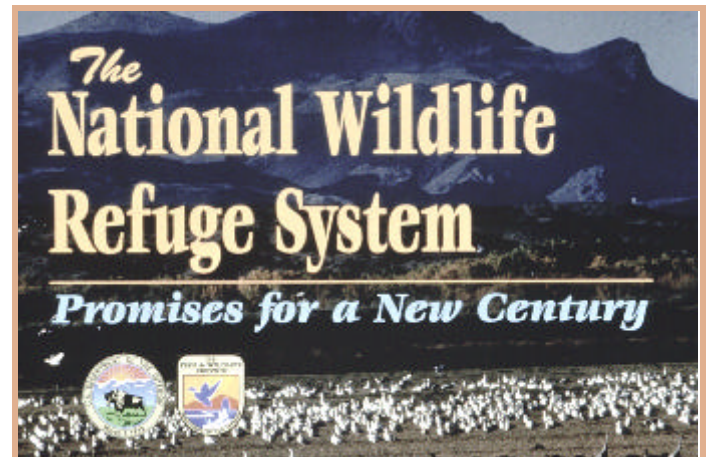
This Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) and associated Environmental Assessment (EA)(Appendix I) was prepared by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) for the Necedah National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge). It is intended to provide long-range guidance and management direction for the Refuge to accomplish its purpose, contribute to the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System, and to meet other relevant mandates.

1.1 The National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997

In 1997, a bipartisan congressional coalition joined with a diverse group of non-governmental organizations, state fish and wildlife agencies, and the U.S. Department of the Interior, to craft the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997 (Act) (Appendix II). Signed into law by President Clinton on October 9, 1997, the Act amends the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act of 1966, and provides guidance for the management and public use of the National Wildlife Refuge System.

One of the provisions of the Act directs all national wildlife refuges to have a CCP prepared by October 2012, with updates every 15 years thereafter. The Act states that each plan will be consistent with principles of sound fish and wildlife management, available science, legal mandates, and other Service policies, guidelines, and planning documents. The Act further states that CCPs must identify and describe: 1) the purposes of the refuge, 2) the refuge's fish, wildlife and plant populations, their habitats, and archaeological and cultural values; 3) significant problems that may adversely affect wildlife populations and habitats, and ways to correct or mitigate those problems; 4) areas suitable for administrative sites or visitor facilities; and 5) opportunities for wildlife-dependent recreational activities. Guiding the development of CCPs are three important legislative mandates stated in the Act. They are:

- Wildlife has first priority in the management of national wildlife refuges.
- Wildlife-dependent recreation uses or other uses of national wildlife refuges may be allowed only after they have been determined compatible with the refuge purpose.
- Wildlife-dependent recreation activities, namely hunting, fishing, wildlife observation, wildlife photography, and environmental education and interpretation will be emphasized on national wildlife refuges.



In the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, Congress directed that all refuges and related complexes of refuges have a CCP by October 2012, with updates every 15 years thereafter.



1.2 Service Goals for National Wildlife Refuge System Planning

- Ensure that the System is managed for the conservation of fish, wildlife, plants, and their habitats; and that refuge management reflects Service policies, the mission of the System, and the purposes for which the refuge was established.
- Ensure that the administration of the System contributes to the conservation of biological diversity and integrity and to the structure and function of the ecosystems in which refuges are located.
- Ensure that other Service programs; Federal, State, Tribal, and local government agencies; adjacent landowners; and the public have opportunities to participate in the refuge planning process.
- Provide a basis for adaptive management by monitoring progress, evaluating plan implementation, and updating objectives or strategies accordingly.
- Provide long-term continuity in refuge management.

1.3 Service Goals for Comprehensive Conservation Plans

- Provide a clear and comprehensive statement of desired future conditions for each refuge or planning unit.
- Help ensure that management of each refuge fulfills the mission of the System as well as the specific purpose(s) for which we established that refuge.
- Ensure that refuge planning is conducted in concert with an ecosystem approach.
- Support management decisions and their rationale by sound professional judgment.
- Provide a forum for the public to comment on the type, extent, and compatibility of uses on refuges.
- Provide a uniform basis for budget requests for operational, maintenance, and capital improvement programs.
- Ensure public involvement in refuge management decisions by providing a process for effective coordination, interaction, and cooperation with affected parties, including Federal agencies, State conservation agencies, Tribal governments, local governments, conservation organizations, adjacent landowners, and interested members of the public.

1.4 The Planning Process

This CCP was prepared in compliance with the National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997, the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, and Service policy guidance set forth in the Departmental Manual (see part 602 of the Fish and Wildlife Service Manual at the Internet Web Site, www.fws.gov).

While there are many steps involved in developing a CCP, the process the planning team followed for developing the Necedah CCP focused around five functional parts (Figure 1):

- Reaffirming the Refuge's purpose and developing vision,
- Conducting an operational assessment and environmental analysis,
- Establishing management direction (goals and objectives),
- Developing a range of programs, activities, and projects to achieve desired outcomes (implementation strategies), and

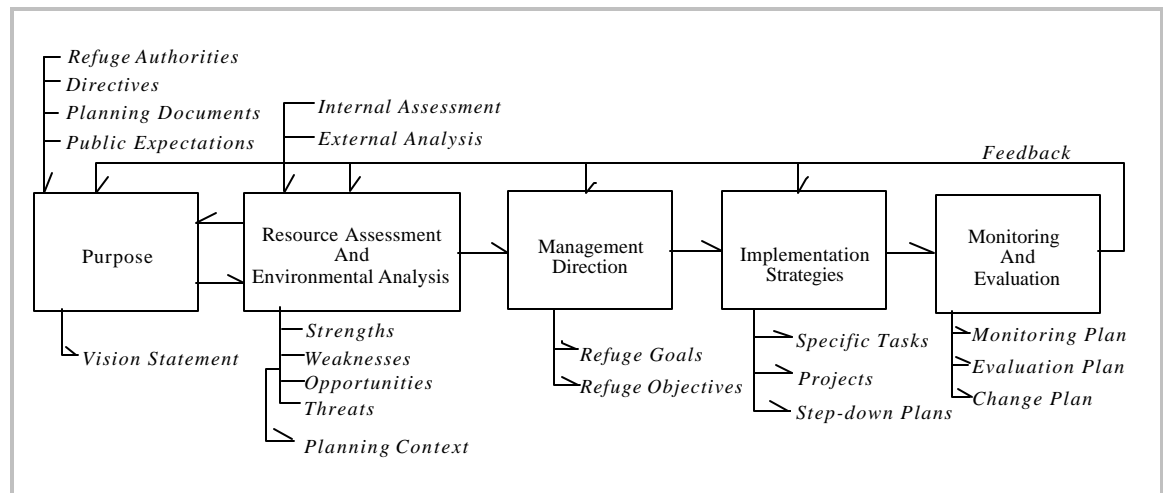


Figure 1 - A planning process model for the Necedah CCP (adapted from Justis et al. 1985)

- Developing protocols to monitor and evaluate progress.

As a first step, the planning team developed a vision statement to provide focus for the actions and character of the Refuge, as well as to clarify its purpose and direction. In developing the vision statement, the planning team reviewed the Refuge's authorizing legislation, national and regional directives, internal and external planning documents, and information relative to the public's expectations for the Refuge.

An operational assessment and environmental analysis was performed to diagnose the Refuge's current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats. Strengths and weaknesses refer to internal factors, operational components controlled by management such as habitat, certain fish and wildlife populations, resource protection, cooperative programs, administration, work force, public use, and maintenance. Opportunities and threats refer to external factors, such as favorable actions or situations in the Refuge environment that can benefit the Refuge, or unfavorable actions or situations in the Refuge environment that may impede operation and/or development of the Refuge. External factors include the Refuge's biological environment, physical environment, political/legal environment, economic environment, and socio/cultural environment. The results of the operational assessment and environmental analysis formed a planning context (Chapter 3) and provided the basis from which management direction was derived.

Management direction was established through a strategic framework, which we define as a pattern of purposes, policies, programs, actions, decisions, or resource allocations that describe what the Refuge is, what it does, and why it does it. Refuge goals were developed that articulate broad direction, end results, or positions to be achieved. Refuge objectives serve as intermediate-term targets necessary for the accomplishment of goals.

Strategies and projects were developed to describe the means, methods, and approaches used to achieve Refuge objectives (also answers the who, what, why, when, and where questions).



Introduction

However, in many cases step-down management plans will be developed to provide the specific details necessary for implementation of objectives, strategies, and projects. In this regard, step-down management plans refer to annual work plans, fire management plans, public use plans, inventory and monitoring plans, and occupational safety and health plans (see Chapter V for a list of step-down plans and schedules for revisions). Thus, the CCP provides an overview of future Refuge programs and projects and leaves the details of scheduling and budgets to be developed as funding levels and staffing patterns become clearer. Refuge staff will set priorities and make decisions based on Refuge operating needs and directives from Regional and Washington Office staff.

Finally, the fifth process function dealt with developing monitoring and evaluation protocols. Four basic steps capture monitoring and evaluation: (1) identification and establishment of predetermined standards of strategy performance, (2) a measurement of the actual performance results, (3) a comparison of the results achieved against those previously established, and (4) determining whether the CCP is producing the desired results, or if corrective action is necessary. The CCP was developed using the best information available at the time of preparation. As new and better information emerges, including new input from partners and stakeholders, the CCP will be revised. Additional step-down plans will be developed to address plan monitoring, plan evaluation, and plan change procedures. Adaptive management will be fundamental to keeping the plan active and effective.

1.5 Public Involvement

The Service used a highly participatory planning process to develop the Necedah National Wildlife Refuge CCP. Throughout the CCP process, the Service initiated outreach to diverse stakeholders, including representatives from other Federal and state agencies, county and township governments, local drainage districts, special interest groups such as birders, hunters, and anglers, industry and non-profit organizations, landowners living adjacent to the Refuge and within the Yellow River area, Refuge visitors, and Service employees.

Information about the CCP was provided to stakeholders and the general public through news releases, presentations, interviews, informational letters, newsletters, public meetings, briefings, and the Internet. Questionnaires, focus groups, public meetings, and one-on-one discussions were used to gather input from Refuge visitors, neighbors, and other stakeholders (Appendix III). A geographic information system was developed to aid in the analysis and transfer of information. Additional information on the public involvement process is located in the attached Environmental Assessment and in Appendix III.



Stakeholder consultation was an important part of developing the Refuge CCP.

Stakeholders suggested, among other things, that the Refuge.....

L Needs to transition from wildlife management on the Refuge to applied ecology within the Refuge ecosystem.

L Should consider the needs of its visitors when making habitat management decisions.

L Must be pro-active in addressing environmental concerns that could adversely affect the Refuge.

L Should widely publicize Refuge events and activities.

L Needs to focus its management efforts on Service trust resources



2. THE U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is the principal Federal agency responsible for conserving, protecting and enhancing fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.

The Service manages the 93-million acre National Wildlife Refuge System of more than 520 national wildlife refuges and thousands of small wetlands and other special management areas. It also operates 66 national fish hatcheries, 64 fishery resource offices and 78 ecological services field stations. Among its key functions, the Service enforces Federal wildlife laws, protects endangered species, manages migratory birds, restores nationally significant fisheries, conserves and restores wildlife habitat such as wetlands, and helps foreign governments with their international conservation efforts. It also oversees the Federal Aid program that distributes hundreds of millions of dollars in excise taxes on fishing and hunting equipment to state fish and wildlife agencies.

The Service employs approximately 7,500 people at facilities across the country, with a headquarters in Washington D.C., 7 geographic regions, and nearly 700 field units. Necedah National Wildlife Refuge is located in the Great Lakes-Big Rivers Region of the Service, which includes the states of Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Ohio, and Wisconsin (Figure 2). The Great Lakes-Big Rivers Region manages over 1.2 million acres of land and water on 46 national wildlife refuges and 9 wetland management districts, including more than 240,000 acres in waterfowl production areas. The Region also manages 6 national fish hatcheries, 9 fisheries stations, 10 ecological services field offices, and 18 law enforcement field offices.

2.1 Mission Statement of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

The mission of the Service is *working with others, to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, and plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people.*

2.2 Goals of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

- ***Sustainability of Fish and Wildlife Populations:*** Migratory birds, endangered fish and wildlife species, interjurisdictional fish, and marine mammals are conserved, protected, enhanced, or restored. The Service is participating in conservation of other species when its expertise, facilities, or lands can enhance state, tribal, or local efforts.
- ***Habitat Conservation - Network of Lands and Waters:*** An ecologically diverse network of lands and waters, of various ownerships, is conserved to provide habitats for marine mammals and migratory, interjurisdictional, endangered, and other species associated with ecosystems conserved in cooperation with others.
- ***Connecting Americans to Wildlife:*** The American public understands and participates in the conservation and use of fish and wildlife resources.
- ***Workforce Excellence:*** The Service's workforce, scientific capability, and business practices - in cooperation with the Department of Interior's scientific expertise - fully support achievement of the Service mission.



2.3 Objectives of the Service

- Assist in the development and application of an environmental stewardship ethic for our society, based on ecological principles, scientific knowledge of fish and wildlife, and a sense of moral responsibility.
- Guide the conservation, development, and management of the Nation's fish and wildlife resources.
- Administer a national program to provide the public opportunities to understand, appreciate, and wisely use fish and wildlife resources.

2.4 Functions of the Service

- Acquire, protect, and manage unique ecosystems necessary to sustain fish and wildlife such as migratory birds, resident species, and endangered species.
- Operate a National Fish Hatchery System in support of the restoration of depleted interjurisdictional fish stocks, the recovery of federally listed threatened and endangered species, and the fulfillment of Federal mitigation responsibilities.
- Provide protection of fish and wildlife from dislocation or destruction of their habitats, overuse, and industrial, agricultural, and domestic pollutants.
- Render financial and professional technical assistance to States through Federal Aid programs for the enhancement and restoration of fish and wildlife resources.
- Conduct programs of enforcement, management, and professional technical assistance to other agencies for the protection of endangered species.
- Promulgate and enforce regulations for the protection of migratory birds, marine mammals, fish and other non-endangered wildlife from illegal taking, transportation, or sale within the United States or from foreign countries.
- Conduct programs of planning, evaluation, and professional technical assistance to other agencies for the proper use and protection of fish and wildlife habitat that directly benefit the living natural resource and add quality to human life.
- Conduct programs of interpretation, education, and recreation to foster a stewardship ethic in the American public through high quality fish and wildlife oriented experiences.
- Communicate information essential for public awareness and understanding of the importance of fish and wildlife resources and interprets fish and wildlife changes reflecting environmental degradation that ultimately will affect the welfare of human beings.



By law and treaty, the Service has national and international management and law enforcement responsibilities for migratory birds, threatened and endangered species, interjurisdictional fish, and certain marine mammals.



3. THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM



The National Wildlife Refuge System is the world's largest and most diverse collection of lands and waters set aside specifically for wildlife. The refuge system began in 1903 when President Theodore Roosevelt designated 3-acre Pelican Island, a pelican and heron rookery in Florida, as a national bird sanctuary.

Today, over 500 national wildlife refuges have been established from the Arctic Ocean to the South Pacific, from Maine to the Caribbean. Varying in size from half-acre parcels to thousands of square miles, they encompass more than 92 million acres of the Nation's best wildlife habitats. The vast majority of these lands are in Alaska, with the rest spread across the rest of the United States and several U.S. territories.

Like Pelican Island, many early wildlife refuges were created for herons, egrets, and other water birds. Other refuges were set aside for large mammals like elk and bison. However, most national wildlife refuges were created to protect migratory waterfowl. This is a result of the United States' responsibilities under international treaties for migratory bird conservation and legislation such as the Migratory Bird Conservation Act of 1929. Refuges dot the map along the four major "flyways" that waterfowl follow from their northern nesting grounds to southern wintering areas.

National wildlife refuges play a vital role in preserving endangered and threatened species and their habitat. Among these are Aransas National Wildlife Refuge in Texas, the winter home of the whooping crane; the Florida Panther National Wildlife Refuge, which protects one of the Nation's most endangered mammals; the Hawaiian Islands National Wildlife Refuge, home of the Laysan duck and monk seal; and the Necedah National Wildlife Refuge, which provides critical habitat for the federally-endangered Karner blue butterfly.

Nationwide, some 34 million visitors annually hunt, fish, observe, and photograph wildlife or participate in interpretive activities on Service national wildlife refuges.



National wildlife refuges provide the public with a wide variety of recreational and educational opportunities. Many refuges have fishing and hunting programs, visitor centers, wildlife trails, and environmental education programs.



3.1 Mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System

The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System is to *administer a national network of lands and waters for the conservation, management, and where appropriate, restoration of fish, wildlife, and plant resources and their habitats within the United States for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.*

3.2 Goals of the National Wildlife Refuge System

- Preserve, restore, and enhance in their natural ecosystems (when practical) all species of animals and plants that are endangered or threatened with becoming endangered.
- Perpetuate the migratory bird resource.
- Preserve a natural diversity and abundance of fauna and flora on refuge lands.
- Provide an understanding and appreciation of fish and wildlife ecology and humankind's role in their environment and to provide refuge visitors with high quality, safe, wholesome and enjoyable recreational experiences oriented toward wildlife to the extent these activities are compatible with the purposes for which each refuge was established.

3.3 Guiding Principles of the National Wildlife Refuge System

- **Habitat:** Fish and wildlife will not prosper without high quality habitat, and without fish and wildlife, traditional uses of refuges cannot be sustained. The Refuge System will continue to conserve and enhance the quality and diversity of fish and wildlife habitat within refuges.
- **Public Use:** The Refuge System provides important opportunities for compatible wildlife-dependent recreational activities involving hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation.
- **Partnerships:** America's sportsmen and women were the first partners who insisted on protecting valuable wildlife habitat with wildlife refuges. Conservation partnerships with other Federal agencies, state agencies, tribes, organizations, industries, and the general public can make significant contributions to the growth and management of the Refuge System.
- **Public Involvement:** The public should be given full and open opportunity to participate in decisions regarding the acquisition and management of our national wildlife refuges.

